

Pertussis on the Increase – Over 20 Cases in St. Joseph County

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As of September 30, 100 cases of pertussis (whooping cough) have been reported in Indiana, which is more than double the number of cases reported (49) for the same period last year. Many other cases are currently under investigation. Nationally a similar increase in cases is being reported, with 9,983 cases reported through September 25, 2004, compared with 5,978 in 2003 (a 67% increase) for the same time period.

Thirty-one counties in Indiana had reported cases by the end of September. Twenty-three cases have occurred in St. Joseph County, with 20 of the cases having cough onset since June 25. As is the situation statewide, several more cases are currently under investigation in St. Joseph County. Cases in St. Joseph County range in age from less than one month to 46 years. Eleven of the cases are 10 years or older, and seven are under the age of one. Of the seven cases under the age of one year, four have been hospitalized. Twelve of the cases are male and 11 are female. Seventeen (74%) of the cases are white, and 6 (26%) are black or African American.

A pertussis alert, along with [Recommended Pertussis Control Measures](#), was sent to physicians and infection control nurses in St. Joseph County on August 20. Schools and daycare centers with cases have sent letters home to parents advising of potential exposure and symptoms. The St. Joseph County outbreak is ongoing and a complete write-up of the outbreak will follow when cases diminish.

Pertussis vaccine is currently licensed only for children under 7 years of age, and vaccine-produced immunity begins to wane approximately five years after the last dose is given. Six of the cases were too young to have received at least three doses of vaccine. Waning immunity is often cited for the increase in cases among adolescents and adults. Increased suspicion among clinicians, improved diagnosis, and improved reporting are also factors in the increase in this age group.

Pertussis is characterized by one or more of the following symptoms:

- Prolonged cough (lasting 10-14 days and more)
- Long spells of coughing with spasms
- Coughing with a whooping sound
- Coughing that leads to gagging or vomiting

Health care providers who suspect a patient may have pertussis should report it to the local health department immediately. Providers can find information on the disease, laboratory testing, treatment of cases, and prophylaxis of contacts on the [Recommended Pertussis Control Measures](#) mentioned above. Information that can be provided to cases or parents of cases can be found at the ISDH [Quick Facts](#) Web site.
